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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GETTING ON

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RAISE" time has just passed. A new promotion has just been announced. You may have been going along in happy-go-lucky fashion, but you pause at such a time to take stock of yourself. You ask yourself why Sam Jones got a big raise and you got none; why Bill Smith got the job you were hoping would fall to you, somewhat as lightning strikes.

We all of us have these same moments, whether we are getting on or not, and what I am going to say is my own impression of why some men get on and some do not. You feel that you are in a rut. Perhaps you are a newly-fledged engineer seeking to avoid such a pitfall. What should you do to win advancement in the quickest way?

The best way of getting the proper view point on these questions is undoubtedly from the "boss's" standpoint. There are three main lines of contact which the "boss" and others up the line have of gaining an impression of your capabilities:

1. Personal contact.
2. Letters.
3. Mistakes.

I will discuss those matters at length in that order.

THE BOSS

Before we proceed, however, it will be well, first, to analyze the "boss" himself. What are a "boss's" requirements?

Our first thoughts of the "boss" are to the effect of how nice it is to sit in a private office with your feet on a desk, no one to bother you, everyone deferring to your opinion and your only job to sign mail. But consider further. You go to him with a carefully thought out plan, and after a moment's consideration he points out a number of essentials wherein it does not fit in with the company's practices. You submit a letter and he changes the opening paragraph in a way to paint a graphic picture of the subject at hand, smoothing the way for its acceptance and for the details following. His own boss calls him in and he gives a terse, comprehensive picture of a job you are working on and about which, perhaps, you yourself are hazy. He has a better estimate of your ability than you yourself have. He can direct the disposition of your work in a way to get out the important items in a clean-cut manner. You see a letter of his dealing with a difficult situation, and you marvel at the logical, concrete way in which he marshals the essential facts and points out a comprehensive, practical solution.

The real boss needs these qualities. How does he get them? He gets them principally through the exercise of his personality. He cannot make good decisions without a broad background or experience to dictate them. Go back into his history. You will undoubtedly find him with a good record as a forceful student, engineer, checker, supervisor and so on up the line. Some people think that holding an executive position is like being an office boy, all a matter of getting the job. But it is not that; it involves having the experience, the ability and the enthusiasm to run the job. So if he criticizes your actions consider that he knows what he wants and be guided thereby.

PERSONAL CONTACT

To take up the general subject again, the first and in a measure most important contact by which the boss

measures you, is the PERSONAL one. What does he look for in this personal contact? The following points are taken, not in their relative importance, but rather in their logical sequence.

1. The first judgment is appearance. A trim, bright, neat appearance is not to be despised as an asset. Successful men, as a rule, radiate success in their appearance. It's a help rather than a hindrance to look the part of a wide-awake, forceful engineer. He need not nor need you be ashamed of your participation in business conferences with others.

2. The next thing by which the "boss" is apt to judge you is enthusiasm. Show me a man right on top of his job and I will show you a man full of enthusiasm for his work. Make a hobby of your work if you can. If you can't make a hobby of it, make it your serious business during working hours. Take an expert in any line and you will find, with few exceptions, that he is a "bug" about it. Many a man has failed in other work only to make a success of his "hobby." It is this enthusiasm, this extra ounce of effort which you put into your work, that brings you to the attention of the "boss" and makes him feel that you will progress. In connection with this item let me also bring out a closely allied characteristic, that of loyalty to the organization you are in. A great many men recently come into a new organization make the mistake of criticizing its methods and comparing them in a detrimental way with those of the old organization. This is a mistake. The new organization warrants your whole loyalty. If you have constructive suggestions, make them, but don't run down either your new or your old employer, for it will mean only loss of respect for you.

3. I should next put the characteristic of "quality." What does "quality" mean? It means that you have done a whole job, not a 90 per cent or even a 99 per cent. job. Don't take a chance that the details are right, but check them to make sure they are. Don't leave half of the questions in a letter unanswered. Don't make a statement you cannot substantiate. Don't consider only one phase of a development. If it has a history, start from the beginning. Don't go to the boss with only half-baked ideas. He probably can and will find you out with a few pointed questions. Don't give him the chance. In other words, get a reputation for doing a job which is complete. Present your thoughts in all cases in a logical, straightforward way which will hit him between the eyes. He will call it a "good" job—a "quality" job.

4. The next characteristic is "quantity." That means speed. Don't lag on the job. A new man has a hard row to hoe in the matter of speed. He can't make a lot of speed and yet investigate every angle of a matter. I believe in making haste slowly. It's easier for the boss to pass a good job once than a poor job two or three times, and his opinion of you is better. On the other hand, your reputation for speed won't suffer too much at this period if you can discriminate as to what matters are important and need instant action and what ones can wait. If your boss asks for something in a hurry, give it to him in a hurry or let him know why it can't be gotten instantly, and when he can expect it. Good application to the work in hand will usually produce a satisfactory "quantity" of work.

5. Reliability.—This is in a measure tied up with "Quality." Quality, however, deals with the grade of your work; "reliability," with the grade of your performance. If you are reliable your boss can give you some work and rest assured it will be taken care of. He knows that you will be on hand under all except absolutely preventative conditions; that your sense of responsibility for the acceptance of the company's money will not let you take advantage of conditions which could be used as an excuse for evading your work. If you are reliable the boss will not have to hear you say that the thing he wants is one you have overlooked. Be reliable so that the boss can depend on you.

6. Resourcefulness.—If you are told to look up the drawings for the 604-type switchboard, do you go out to your desk and sit around a while and then go back and ask the boss where to find them? He suggests the file, but again you go back with the report that you can find nothing in the files. After perhaps several more efforts does he become disgusted, step out of the room, ask Bill what the number of the stock specification is and in a few minutes have the information? It's easy when you know how—that is, if you are resourceful. Do you run to the boss every time you hit a snag, or do you work your way around it? He appreciates resourcefulness. He probably could tell you how to solve a great many of the problems you run into. But he cannot take the time for all that, or he might as well do the detail work himself. A boss will always take recognition of a man when he can tell him to get something and then forget it until it arrives. He might not always approve your methods, if you told him of them; but he appreciates the fact that you get the result. Resourcefulness is a very desirable characteristic to have.

7. A lot of men have prominent characteristics which make them stand out from the ordinary. It is easy to see that some distinguishing mark which makes an impression on your fellow workers and on your superiors will help to fix you in their minds. You are more than just "one of the engineers." There are some characteristics which it is desirable to have and which could well be cultivated. Are you aggressive, a good speaker, enthusiastic, of good personality, co-operative, of good judgment, ambitious, prepossessing, keen, active, honest, truthful and neat? Characteristics on the other side of the ledger which are to be avoided are: Laziness, dullness, obstructiveness, lack of co-operation, surliness, dishonesty, untruthfulness, slowness, slovenliness, poor speech.

LETTERS.

The second method by which the boss obtains his impressions of you and your work is through your letters. While your immediate superior does, and in certain cases should, see to it that your letters are along the proper lines, yet if your work is outstanding you will find that he has little to correct, and your ability is recognized all along the line.

Requirements of Good Letters.—You will naturally want to know what constitutes a good letter. It can be summed up as follows: Be direct, be brief, be clear.

Subject.—As the newspaper uses a headline, so make your subject. Make it a headline to indicate broadly what the letter is all about. Form it so that it will be correctly filed in the proper folder and so that the reader can always say definitely just what folder that is. Put into the subject something definite that will distinguish the letter from any other letter. Don't use a broad subject that would cover practically anything. Take particular care to carry on general correspondence under a general subject and not under a job title.

Introduction.—Where an inter-house letter is written, there is a space provided where reference is to be made to the letter number, dictator's initials, department number and date of the letter being answered. Use it. Then don't encumber the letter proper with a repetition. The above information, however, is as essential to others as it is to you in allowing the letter to come quickly to the proper people.

Body of Letter.—Start right in to say what you have to say. But remember that a whole lot of people will have to read it who don't know the details and who don't want to know them; who, in fact, haven't the letter you are answering at hand. So write into your letter enough of what you are talking about; then whoever reads it gets a comprehensive idea. "Your action is satisfactory," may be all right as an answer to the man who wrote the letter if he has it before him; but how do your checker, your supervisor and your department head know, and the various men in charge on the other end know, what it is all about? How can they pass it along at a glance or know that it needs further investigation? How much more effort is it to say, "Your action in providing relay rack fuse panels arranged for W.E.Co. fuses is satisfactory?" That tells a complete story.

Next be logical. Arrange the subject matter of your letter so that it leads from one thought to another and to a conclusion. Don't write anything into a letter unless it means something. Every sentence and every word in a letter should be there for a purpose, to bring out a thought, an idea. Don't wander around in your words and get lost.

If you are answering a letter answer every question raised or indicate when an answer will be given. Don't assume that silence gives consent, even though the action indicated is satisfactory to you.

If you wish an answer to your letter, definitely state that fact. If you make it easy for your correspondent to dictate the answer by formulating it for him, you will get it more surely and quickly.

In the days gone by they were accustomed to write letters like this: "Yours of the 17th ultimo received and contents noted, and we beg to state, etc." Those days are over. Do not use obsolete or stock expressions which are not what you mean. If you mean, "We have received your letter of April 17th, 1922, and will ship the two barrels of glue you ordered, etc.," why say it. Another common mistake is the use of "if" for "whether." You do not want to know "if this is true;" you want to know "whether it is true."

Do not repeat the same word a large number of times in the same sentence or letter, as it loses its effectiveness and makes the letter hard to read. Make your letters easy to read. Don't confuse your important ideas with a lot of details, but make them stand out. Don't use words wrongly. If you do not know their meaning definitely, look them up in a dictionary.

Perhaps a last word of caution should be to learn what kind of a letter the boss expects and give him that kind. However, if you write what is universally conceded to be a good letter you will find that it will satisfy the bosses all the way up the line.

Examples.—The following are examples of good and bad letters which illustrate a number of common faults.

Take the following:

"On some jobs, it is necessary to arrange the call indicator trunks to work as call wire trunks until the time of cut-over and in these cases, old busy back circuits must be retained as long as these trunks are to work as call wire trunks, the call indicator busy back circuit not being

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arranged to supply interrupter ground to the ring side of the cord when inserted in the call indicator busy back jacks which is necessary for call wire trunks."

The fault here is lack of clearness; clearness can usually be gained by breaking up long sentences as follows:

"On some jobs it is necessary to arrange the call indicator trunks to work as call circuit trunks until the time of cut-over. In these cases the old busy back circuits must be retained or operation with the trunks on the call circuit basis. The call indicator busy back circuit is not arranged to supply interrupted ground to the ring side of the cord, which condition is necessary when functioning with the call circuit trunks."

A second example follows:

"The central office code number will be dialed by the calling party, which will cause the first selector brush to make contact with an idle trunk from the central office on the selector level."

Here the various phrases, descriptive of the operation, are not in logical order. Consider the ease of interpreting this corrected phrase.

"The calling party will dial the central office code number. This will cause the first selector brushes to make contact on that level with an idle trunk line to the central office."

Before you send a letter, check it over carefully. It is better for you to catch the errors than for your boss to do so. Check it for all of the items enumerated above as well as for enclosures, addresses, signatures, conformity to routines, etc. It is worth your while because of the better letters that you will write.

Consider the following definitions:

An Engineer.—One who economically directs man power and by scientific design utilizes the forces and materials of nature for the benefit of mankind.

To Engineer.—To put through or arrange skillfully, by contrivance or effort.

It would be a good thing to "engineer" your letters.

MISTAKES

The last and worst method by which your boss will know you is through your mistakes.

Mistakes may be brought to your superior's attention by the incoming letters which point them out; or in the case of more serious mistakes, they may be brought to his attention by those in charge of other organizations, who wish to make a point of the matter. In any event they are brought forcibly to the boss's attention and you are put in an unfavorable light.

When you have made a mistake and you are called upon to explain, what should be your attitude? Some men feel that any kind of an excuse will shift their responsibility. Far from it. The boss knows that the mistake has been made. He feels the same responsibility for it that you do. In fact he probably has been called "on the carpet" and "raked over the coals" for it before he calls you in. An excuse does not remedy the damage. If you are at fault, admit it. If there are extenuating circumstances, give them. State that you plan to see that such a mistake never happens again and then see that the promise is religiously kept.

A good way to avoid mistakes is to get into the habit of reviewing your decisions from the general standpoint of whether they are practical, of whether the facts in the case warrant the decision, whether they accord with the accepted policies of the company for similar cases, and whether you thoroughly agree with them. Don't let your immediate superior make your decisions if you

feel they are wrong. Go to him with the facts you feel justify your stand, and talk it over. If you are still overruled, it will have made such an impression on you that if the decision is wrong you will be able to recall your opinion in the matter.

Another way to avoid errors is not to make halfbaked decisions with the idea that the boss will change them if they are not right. He may catch them, but he will blame you for a poor decision. He depends on you, who have the detailed facts, to make statements that you can and will defend. If you can not, beat him to it by calling the matter to his attention.

Another source of bad impressions is this: The boss calls you into the office on a matter. You are uncertain of your facts, but hesitate to admit your uncertainty, perhaps, before other persons before whom the admission would be poor policy. You make some positive statements, which is what you should do. The boss would rather have them than a lot of indefinite answers. But then do you forget the matter and take a chance? If you do, you are "digging a nice hole" for yourself and your boss, because he is taking the responsibility for your statements. If you have any doubts, look up the facts immediately; and if you are wrong call up your boss and tell him at once. He can easily remedy the matter then, whereas later it may cause serious trouble.

One thing should be kept in mind. To err is human and the boss is willing to give you the benefit of the doubt the first time, but beware of future errors of the same sort, for you can not excuse them, and they are credited to carelessness and inefficiency.

CONCLUSION

You say, "It's easy to preach, that lots of men work hard and don't get recognition, where others who are smoother and better talkers pass them when it comes to the material rewards." There do appear to be injustices along this line, but in the long run, good hard work, intelligently applied, has its reward. A smooth talker, without other redeeming characteristics, may go ahead for a time, but you will find that he does not last. I will admit that a certain amount of salesmanship is very desirable. Done in the right way, it is a benefit to your boss as well as to yourself, as it keeps him in touch with your work, your problems and your ambitions. But back of it all the boss senses your abilities by what you do, and it is by this that he judges your advancement and your salary increases.

It isn't very often that you can talk the boss into a raise or more responsible work. Such things generally come to you by means of your performance; by your acceptance of a little more responsibility than is demanded; by your doing a little more than you need to do. After all it only takes a very little to put you from the "good" into the "best" class, but it is that little extra push, that little extra ounce of effort, that touch of enthusiasm which separates the "comer," the man who gets ahead, from the one who does not.

APPLIED CHEMISTRY

KI+²S=KISS: a conjugate salt. The reaction takes place more rapidly in the absence of light and a slight pressure is very beneficial. It has a sweet taste and ethereal odor. When taken in small quantities it produces a blissful sensation; but in large quantities it has a nauseous effect. It is soluble in distilled moonlight and is best precipitated in the absence of humanity. The presence of a catalytic agent, for example, LOVE, increases the speed and the temperature of the reaction. —Rose Polytechnic.